

God's Love on Display

No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (1 John 4:12).

Scripture: 1 John 4:7-13

Song: "Beloved, Let Us Love One Another"

Every summer I volunteer at a camp for foster kids. It is a tiring but incredible week during which God's love is on display. Whatever past issues or challenging behaviors kids might come with, each counselor and staff member show love to every child who gets off the camp bus. It's a week intended for fun, healing, and restoration.

While God's physical presence cannot be seen at camp, the love that flows through the ministry there makes Him known. This is the principle that the apostle John is talking about in his letter. The reality of God is made manifest to others by His love on display in our lives. John implores us to love one another because God loves us. Then the love that we receive from God overflows to others.

How is God's love on display in our lives? As we ponder that question, may we open our hearts anew to God's grace and be refreshed in His love. It is from our connection to His love for us that we can demonstrate sincere love even to those who may be difficult to love.

Father, thank You for loving me. I open my heart to being Your conduit of love today. In Jesus' name, amen.

November 6–12. **Tina Clark** is a counselor with a background in children's ministry. Her passion is encouraging others in their Christian walk.

No Fear in Love

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:18).

Scripture: 1 John 4:14-21

Song: “Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)”

Maybe my cat is in the dryer, I thought as I checked it before I ran it. No, she wasn't. *Well, maybe she's in there now,* I thought as I checked it again. As someone with obsessive-compulsive disorder, my life features some fear-based struggles. However, remembering that God loves me and doesn't want me to fear gives me the strength to trust Him and stop doing things like repeatedly checking the dryer.

Fear and love are opposites: fear binds and threatens us; love frees and consoles us. Fear keeps us from fully experiencing life within God's love. If we can trust God's love, however, our fear starts to subside.

The person who trusts God's perfect love and who loves perfectly will not live in fear. However, we are imperfect beings. As a result, there are times when we fear: we lose a job, and we're afraid for our future; our kids are sick, and we fear for their health; or maybe we're afraid our cat might be in the dryer. Regardless of what we're facing, we can choose to run to God and receive His love—perfect love that can cast out our fear.

Father, thank You for Your perfect love. When worry wells up in my heart, I'll run to You and find shelter in Your love, which drives away my fear. In Jesus' name, amen.

Powerful Protection

What does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good? (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

Scripture: Deuteronomy 10:12-22

Song: "The Law of the Lord Is Perfect"

Alligator mothers are good mothers. They're extremely protective of their young, at times even carrying their babies in their mouths to safeguard them from danger. Since the jaws of an alligator are enormously powerful, would-be predators keep their distance, not daring to pursue young gators while they're near their mother.

Just as young alligator offspring enjoy safety under their mother's vigilant strength, so we can live in safety under the powerful protection of our Father, Almighty God. As we remain near Him, loving and honoring Him, walking in His ways, we avail ourselves fully of His protection, provision, and peace.

It may be difficult to understand God's commands at times. We may want to stray from them to see whether we can make it on our own. However, as we consider all that God has done for us, we can trust that His commands are for our protection. As God's children we can gratefully follow His instructions, knowing they will keep us safe and allow us to experience all the good God has for us.

Father, thank You for providing protection, provision, and peace through Your loving commands. Help me as I seek to follow You with all my heart. In Jesus' name, amen.

Illusions of Comfort

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

Scripture: Galatians 5:1-6

Song: “I Am Free”

Cats love boxes. Boxes are comforting to them. In fact they love boxes so much that it appears they will even choose to sit in the optical illusion of one. In an experiment, cat owners taped various configurations of markers onto their floors, one of the arrangements suggesting a square. The majority of those who completed the study reported that their cats preferred sitting inside the square shape, as though sitting in a box.

While these cats had the freedom to wander the room, they seem to have chosen the illusion of fake comfort. The Galatians were choosing an illusion of comfort as well: they were starting to look to aspects of the law for assurance of salvation. Paul implored them to remember that they had been set free in Christ.

Some of us may struggle with feeling we must do x , y , and z to be assured of our salvation. We may be susceptible to an illusion of comfort when we stick to certain traditions, rituals, and rules. However, we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). While we don't pursue deliberate sin, we can let go of the burden of trying to “check off boxes” to feel accepted by God and, instead, celebrate our freedom in following Christ.

Father, You have set me free. I will leave behind my illusions of comfort and trust Your saving grace. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Greatest Commandment

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . .’ And . . . ‘Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39).

Scripture: Matthew 22:34-40

Song: “Love God, Love People”

When I taught children’s church, I summed up our class rules with this statement: “Love God and love others.” When the students loved God and others, they wouldn’t talk when other people were talking, and they wouldn’t disrupt the class. It helped to teach them that when they had love for God and others in their hearts, they would care about others being able to have the best opportunity to learn.

In the Ten Commandments, the first four commands have to do with our conduct toward God, and the last six have to do with our conduct toward others (Exodus 20:1-17). In today’s passage Jesus summed up the essence of these commands with His answer to the Pharisees: love God with all that is in you, and love others, treating them as you would want to be treated.

When love becomes the motivation for our choices, obeying God’s commands stops being a to-do list, and we find fulfillment in keeping His ways. With our priorities set on love, we don’t need to put pressure on ourselves to get everything right. With love for God and others, pretty much everything else will fall into place.

Father, I want to realign my priorities today, loving You first and foremost, and loving and treating people as I’d want to be treated. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Love, Not Revenge

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:18).

Scripture: Leviticus 19:11-18

Song: “Forgiveness”

When I was completing my bachelor’s degree, I worked with a teacher who discouraged me. She made statements that cut deeply, and the things she said to me made me lose confidence. It took a long time for me to recover from it. However, one night I wrote a letter to her—one I never intended to send—telling her what she’d done and that I forgave her. That night I felt free from the hold she’d had on me. I could have held a grudge against her, but I knew that she was loved by God and that God wanted me to love her.

In Leviticus 19, God instructed the Israelites to love their neighbors as themselves, to hold no grudges, and to seek no revenge. God loved each and every one of them, and fighting among themselves would bring disunity and dishonor God.

God’s love for us can help us to let go of grudges and the desire to seek revenge. While it is difficult to forgive those who have wronged us, it is important that we release grudges we’re holding on to and that have a hold on us. We can do that by remembering God’s great love for us, His love for each individual, and His command that we love our neighbors as ourselves.

Father, give me the kind of love for others that honors You and heals my heart. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Looking Through the Lens of Love

Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:10).

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Romans 13:8-10

Song: “Father, Make Us Loving”

I was captivated by the words of a visiting missionary who spoke at my church one Sunday evening. He told about his work in Papua New Guinea and how he carefully translated the Bible into a tribal language, rendering phrases in such a way that made sense within the culture. He clearly loved the people, and that was evident in his work.

Today’s passage reminds us that love is the fulfillment of the law. Through Christ’s love, the missionary was able to obey Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Without God’s love flowing through him, he would not have been able to obey that command and translate the Word of God in such a tender and respectful way.

If we want to fulfill the law, one way to do so is to imagine looking at others through a lens of love. What would a loving action look like toward that person, whether they’re a fellow believer, an acquaintance, or an enemy? Through love, we will be less likely to harm another. When we look through the lens of love and can say, “Yes, that’s what love would look like” and then follow through with that action, we can confidently fulfill God’s commands.

Father, teach me to look through a lens of love. Increase my love for others, and let my loving actions be the fulfillment of Your commands. In Jesus’ name, amen.